The Mughals I: Babur to Akbar

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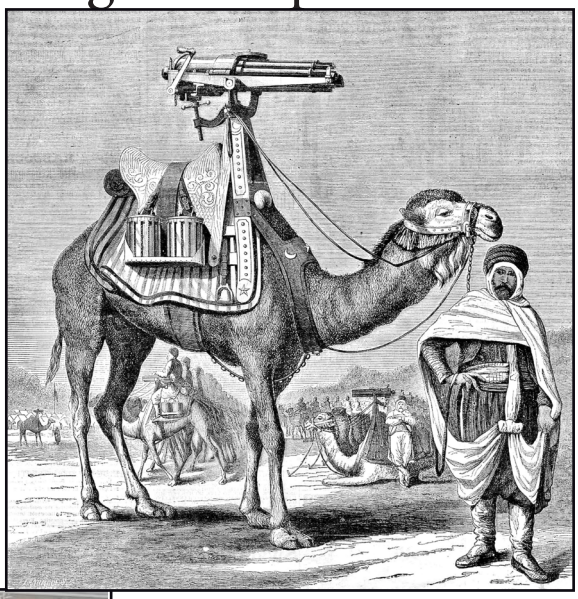
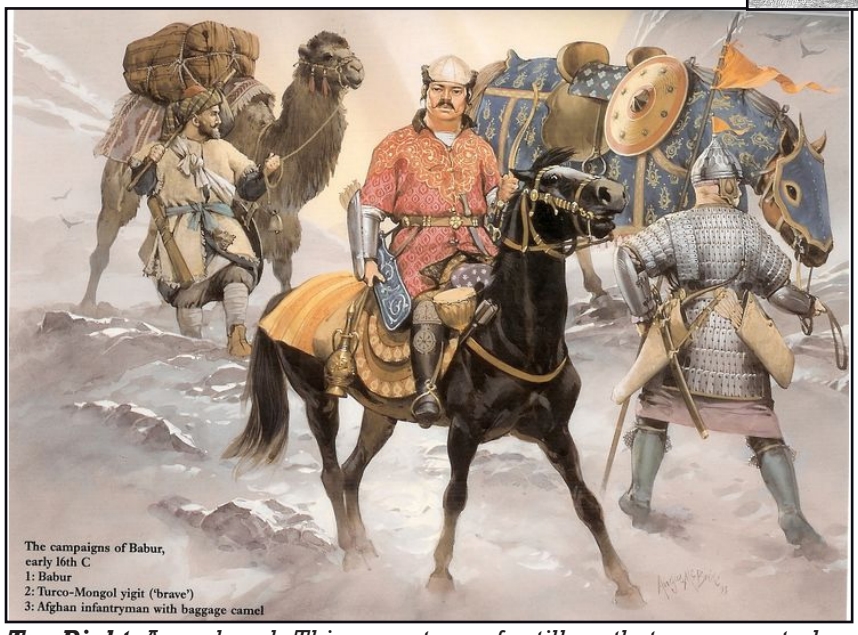
2.1 Emergence of the Mughal Empire

By the beginning of the 16th century, India was disunified and fragmenting. The mighty Delhi Sultanate was plagued with problems - the empire had been weak and had never fully recovered after Timur sacked Delhi in 1398. In the early 1500's, the empire was under the tenuous control of the Lodi dynasty, a ruling family of Afghan origin.

Ibrahim Lodi, the Sultan of Delhi at that time, passed several autocratic decrees, aimed at decreasing the power of the nobles. One of these decrees banned the nobles from sitting in the court. Many of the nobles were deeply upset at these decrees.





Top Right: *A zamburak. This was a type of artillery that was mounted on camels and used extensively in warfare during this period. Babur is documented to have used these.* ***Above****: A modern artistic depiction of Babur with Turko-Mongol soldiers.*

An unhappy noble, by the name of Daulat Khan Lodi, reached out to Babur, who, at the time, was the ruler of Kabul, Afghanistan. Babur accepted the invitation, and at the Battle of Panipat (1526), he defeated Ibrahim Lodi, laying the groundwork for the formation of the Mughal Empire.

The Mughals were people of Central Asian warrior lineage. They were descendents of the Mongols of Central Asia, and they were direct descendants of Timur, and hence were of the Timurid clan. "Mughal" is the Persian word for "Mongol".

Decree - an official order from a leader or a government that becomes the law (*noun*)

Ravine - a deep, very narrow valley with steep sides (*noun*)

2.21 Babur

Above: An early depiction of Babur from a manuscript.

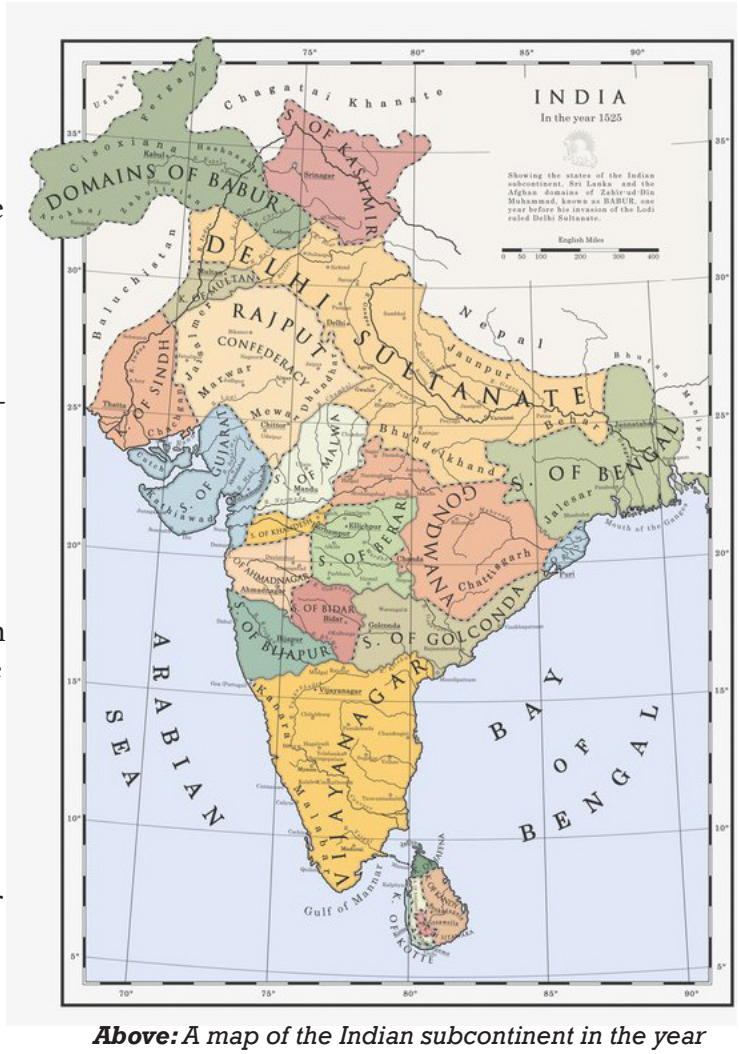
Babur was born on February 14, 1483, in Andijan, Fergana Valley, situated in present-day Uzbekistan. Babur and his father were the descendants of Timur, the legendary warrior and king. Incidentally, Timur claimed to be a descendant of Tumanay Khan, a male-line ancestor he shared with Genghis Khan. Babur's adventurous nature and military acumen can thus be traced to his rich ancestry.

When he was just 11 years old, he lost his father who died while feeding the pigeons in an ill-constructed dovecote that toppled into the ravine below the palace. Babur, who was just a boy at that time, became the king of the Fergana Valley. Babur loved his father, and in his memoirs 'Baburnama', he described his father as a great warrior and a generous ruler.

Babur always wanted to conquer Samarkand - the original kingdom of Timur. Because there was no fixed law of succession among the Turks, every prince of the Timurids—the dynasty founded by Timur—considered it his right to rule the whole of Timur's dominions. Those territories were vast, and, hence, the princes' claims led to unending wars.

Babur eventually managed to conquer Samarkand, but right then a rebellion took place in Fergana. Babur ended up losing both Fergana and Samarkand, two places he would never recapture again

Babur's life was very difficult and harsh in the years that followed. He had to flee the realm for his safety. He lived in a village he called in his memoirs 'Dikhkat', and wandered the mountains without shoes, and it made his feet so hard that 'rock and stone made no difference to them'. His soldiers left him, and for years, Babur had to live the life of a wanderer, unable to give even the basic comforts to his family. Eventually however, he managed to seize control of Kabul in Afghanistan, making that his new kingdom.



Above: *A map of the Indian subcontinent in the year 1525. Babur's territories are shown in green in the top-left. If you look closely you can see Kabul in the center.*

Decree - From Latin *decretum* (something decided)

Ravine - From French *ravin* (a violent rush of water)

Invitation to Invade India

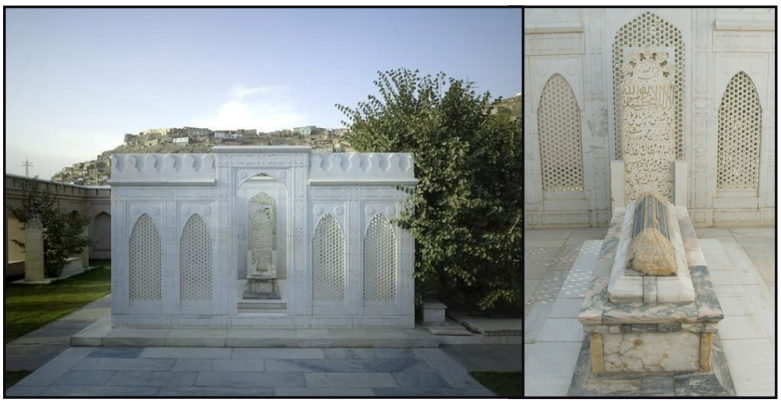
In 1522 CE, an unhappy noble of the Delhi Sultanate, Daulat Khan, reached out to Babur. Daulat Khan was the governor of Lahore at the time and he was dissatisfied with the decrees and policies of the Sultan Ibrahim Lodi. For this reason, he invited Babur to invade India.

Owing to internal infighting and scheming, there was a break-down in relations between Babur and Daulat Khan. Babur defeated him and his sons. Daulat Khan would go on to die in captivity while being transported to Bhera, Punjab, where he was to be imprisoned. However, the events that Daulat Khan had set in motion, had prompted Babur to launch a full scale invasion, aimed at ousting the unpopular Sultan of Delhi.

At the Battle of Panipat (1526 CE), Babur fought and defeated Ibrahim Lodi. Ibrahim Lodi was himself killed in the fighting. In the aftermath of the battle, Babur occupied Delhi and declared himself the ruler. This marked the beginning of the Mughal Empire.

Babur reigned from 1526 - 1530. He established a base in Delhi and waged wars against Rajputs who wished to assert independence as well as Afghan nobles who wanted to restore Afghan rule. Because of the constant conflicts and struggles throughout his short reign, he was unable to establish a well-functioning administration. Because of this, the empire that his son Humayun inherited upon his death, was weak and not well consolidated. This would go on to cause many problems for Humayun during his reign.

Babur eventually died in 1530. There are differing accounts of his death. While some suggest that he died of natural causes, others suggest a prolonged illness or poisoning. After his death, he was buried in Afghanistan, where his tomb still stands to this day.



***Top**: A painting of the Battle of paniapt (1526 CE) This is an illustration in the Vaqi 'at-i Baburi, a Persian translation of the Baburnama, by Deo Gujarati. The painting was made around 1590 CE. It is currently in a museum in Britain.*

***Middle**: A painting of a 16th century Mughal soldier*

***Bottom**: Babur's tomb, in Kabul, Afghanistan. The picture on the right shows the interior up close.*

Assert - to state clearly and definitely that something is true (*verb*)

Flora - the plants of a particular area, type of environment or period of time (*noun*)

Primary Source: The Baburnama

About the Source:

The Baburnama (Memoirs of Babur) is the work of Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur (1483-1530), the founder of Mughal dynasty in India.

He wrote his autobiography, Baburnama, in Chaghatai Turkic. Chagatai is an extinct Turkic language that was spoken in Central Asia. It was translated to Persian during the reign of his grandson Akbar.

The memoirs offer a highly educated Central Asian Muslim's observations of the world in which he lived. There is much on the political and military struggles of his time but also extensive descriptive sections on the physical and human geography, the flora and fauna, nomads in their pastures and urban environments as well as Persian and Turkic literature.

Certain excerpts from Babur's autobiography have been simplified and compiled below.

Above: *The Baburnama has many illustrations. The one above depicts Khusrau Shah, a famous Mughal general, swearing loyalty to Babur*

Left: *An illustration from the Baburnama of Babur hunting rhinos near Peshawar.*

A Rhino near Peshawar:

Today I rode out before dawn. I had a sweet, and fasted throughout the day. We rode to Peshawar (in modern-day Pakistan). After a little while, a person brought word that there was a rhino in a bit of jungle near Bigram, and that people had been stationed near-about it. We took ourselves to the place, formed a ring round the jungle, made a noise, and brought the rhino out.

Humayun and those with him had never seen one before - they were much amazed. It was pursued for two miles; many arrows were shot at it; it was brought down without having made a good attack at man or horse.

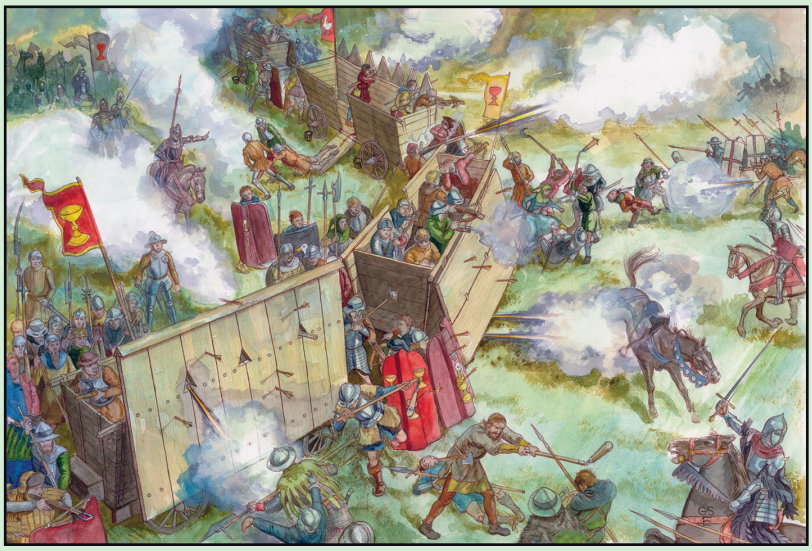
I had often wondered how a rhino and an elephant would behave if brought face to face; this time one came out right in front of some elephants the mahauts were bringing along; it did not face them when the mahauts drove them towards it, but it went away in another direction.

Assert - From Latin *asserere* (to claim/ affirm)

Flora - From Latin *flor* (flower)

Excerpt Describing the Battle of Panipat:

After ordering my light troops to engage a section of the army, I put my foot in the stirrup of resolution, set my hand on the reign of trust in God, and moved forward against Sultan Ibrahim, son of Sultan Sikandar, son of Buhlul Lodi Afghan, in possession of whose throne at that time were the Delhi capital and the dominions of Hindustan, whose standing-army was called a lakh (100,000), whose elephants and whose men's elephants were about 1000.



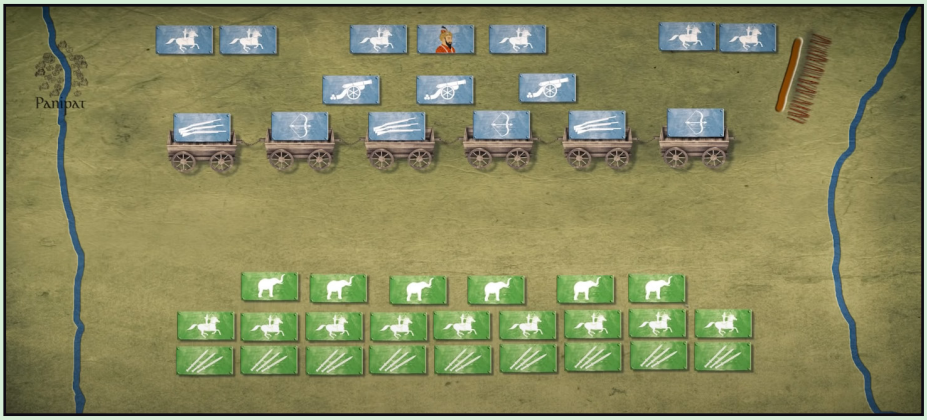
Above: *A modern illustration of carts joined together to form a defensive line. This illustration is of a Hussite wagon fort, not a Mughal one, but the time period (1500's) and the military idea behind the technique is essentially the same.*

At our next camp it was ordered that every man in the army should collect carts, each one according to his circumstances. Seven hundred carts (ardba) were brought in. The order was given to Ustad that these carts should be joined together in the Ottoman fashion, but using ropes of raw hide instead of chains, and that between every two carts 5 or 6 mantelets should be fixed, behind which the matchlockmen were to stand to fire.

Panipat, a city, is on our right with its crowded houses and suburbs. It would be on one side of us ; our other sides must be protected by carts behind which our foot and matchlockmen would stand. Some in the army were very anxious and full of fear. Nothing recommends anxiety and fear. For why? Because what God has fixed in eternity cannot be changed.

People estimated the army opposing us at 100,000 men; Ibrahim's elephants and those of his amirs (lords) were said to be about 1000.

During the 7 or 8 days we lay in Panipat, our men used to go, a few together, close up to Ibrahim's camp, rain arrows down on his massed troops, cut off and bring in heads. Still he made no move ; nor did his troops attack us. Eventually we sent out 4 or 5000 men to deliver a night-attack on his camp. However, because it was night, these men scattered and could not succeed.



Above: *A depiction of the battle formations of Babur (shown in blue) and Ibrahim Lodi (shown in green). The town of Panipat can be seen on Babur's right, and the defensive carts can be seen in front of his army as well. This image is taken from the YouTube channel - Kings and Generals, which provides a detailed breakdown of the entire battle.*

Eventually we surrounded the enemy, rained arrows down on them and fought ungrudgingly. He made one or two small charges on our right and left but under our men's arrows, fell back. His flanks were under attack and his army collapsed. By God's mercy and kindness, this difficult affair was made easy for us! In one half-day, that armed mass was destroyed.

Matchlock - A matchlock or firelock is a historical type of firearm where the gunpowder is ignited by a burning piece of rope that is touched to the gunpowder (*noun*)

Artillery - large, heavy guns which are often moved on wheels (*noun*)

Excerpt Regarding Babur's arrival in Agra:

On our first coming to Agra, there was remarkable dislike and hostility between its people and mine, the peasantry and soldiers running away in fear of our men.

Meantime news came that Humayun had gone into Delhi, and forced his way into several treasure-houses and, without permission, taken their contents. I had never told him he could do such a thing; and it grieved me very much. I wrote him a letter scolding him very firmly.

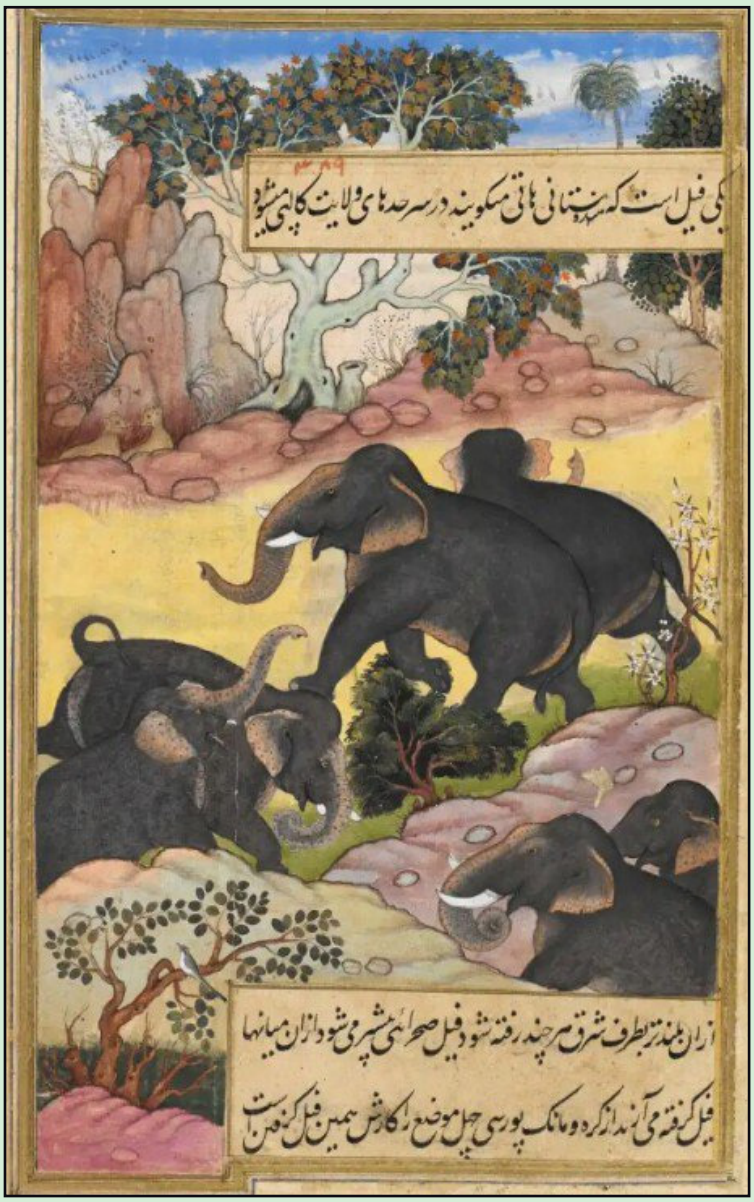
Excerpt Regarding Animals seen in India:

The elephant, which the Hindustanis call hathi , is one of the wild animals native to Hindustan. It inhabits the western borders of the country. The elephant is an immense animal and very wise. If people speak to it, it understands. If they command anything to it, it does it.

Its value is according to its size — the larger it is, the higher the price. On some islands an elephant is rumored to be as tall as 20 or 30 feet, but here it is not more than 10 feet.

It eats and drinks entirely with its trunk. If it loses the trunk, it cannot live. It has two great teeth (tusks) in its upper jaw, one on each side of the trunk. By setting these against trees and walls, it is able to bring them down; with these it fights and does whatever hard tasks fall to it. These teeth are called ivory and are highly valued by Hindustanis.

Like a goat, the elephant has no skin hair. It is relied on to accompany every troop of their armies. It crosses rivers with great ease while carrying a lot of baggage, and three or four can drag without trouble a special piece of artillery that takes four or five hundred men to haul. But its stomach is large. One elephant eats as much as a dozen camels.



Above: *A depiction of elephants seen in India in the Baburnama. This illustration is taken from a 16th century Persian copy of the Baburnama.*

Matchlock - From Middle English match + lock
Artillery - From Old French *artillerie* (a collection of military engines, ie: crossbows, lances, etc.)

2.22 Humayun

Humayun's Early Years

Humayun was born on the 17th March 1508 in Kabul, when Babur was trying to expand his empire. He accompanied Babur on his travels throughout his youth, and by the age of 18, he fought with him in the war at Panipat (1526), which was one of the main battles that established the Mughal Empire.

In 1528, he was given the governorship of Badakhshan - one of the first provinces in the Mughal empire.

The Empire Humayun Inherited:

After the death of his father, Humayun ascended the throne of Delhi. He was the eldest son of Babur. Kamran, Askari and Hindal were his step brothers. He learnt Chagtai Turki (now extinct), Arabic and Persian. He worked as governor of a province in Kabul.

Above: *An illustration of Humayun. This is a watercolor painting made in Delhi during the 1800's, long after Humayun's death.*

He took part in the battles of Panipat and Khanwa. He looked after the administration of many regions. He was nominated by Babur as his successor. Humayun is probably the only king in the history of medieval India whose rule was split into two sections, one from 1530-40 and the other in 1555-56 after fifteen years of exile from India. The name Humayun meant 'fortunate', but through most part of his life, this fortune eluded him.

Legacy of Babur in Uzbekistan

Babur is considered a national hero in Uzbekistan. Even Timur, the Mongol warlord who famously sacked Delhi in 1398 has a museum in the country called the Amir Timur Museum.

The 14th of February is celebrated as Babur day every year, as this is the day that he was said to be born on.

Right: *A statue of Babur in Tashkent, the capital city of Uzbekistan*

Inherit - to receive money, property, etc. from somebody when they die (*verb*)

Ambitious - determined to be successful, rich and powerful (*adj.*)

Problems Faced By Humayun:

Lack of a unified and well-integrated army

The Mughal army was a mixed body of several races—Chaghatais, Uzbeks, Mughals, Persian, Afghans and Hindustanis, etc. Such an army could be kept under control and disciplined only under the leadership of a capable and inspiring commander like Babur. Humayun was too weak for this purpose.

Babur's Distribution of Jagirs: (Land grants)

Babur's nobles and soldiers had helped him a lot in his conquests. Therefore, in order to please them Babur gave them Jagirs. A Jagir was a grant of land. The owner of a jagir had the right to collect land revenue from the land. In many cases, jagirs were given to nobles instead of salary. In due course these nobles became very powerful and they posed a great threat to the stability of the Mughal empire.

Lack of a good administration

Babur spent almost his time in wars and could not properly organize the administration of the territories he conquered. As a result, Humayun inherited an empire that was held together by fear more than anything else.

Shortage of Funds

After getting a lot of wealth from the royal treasuries of Delhi and Ajmer, Babur distributed it so generously among his soldiers and nobles that very little was left for Humayun to run the empire.

Hostility of the Afghans and the Rajputs

The Afghans, who previously ruled Delhi, still had ambition to capture power again. Bahadur Shah, the ruler of Gujarat, was also an Afghan. He was also ambitious for the throne of Delhi. But the most important and powerful Afghan, who later drove away Humayun, was Sher Shah. Though the power of the Rajput's had been weakened by Babur, yet they cherished some hopes of recovering their lost power and territories.

Excerpts of Letters from Babur to Humayun

The text below is an excerpt from a letter written by Babur to his son Humayun in 1529 CE.

You certainly do not excel in letter writing, and you fail chiefly as you have too great a desire to show off your acquirements. In future write unaffectedly, clearly and use plain words. So will the trouble to writer and thy readers be less.

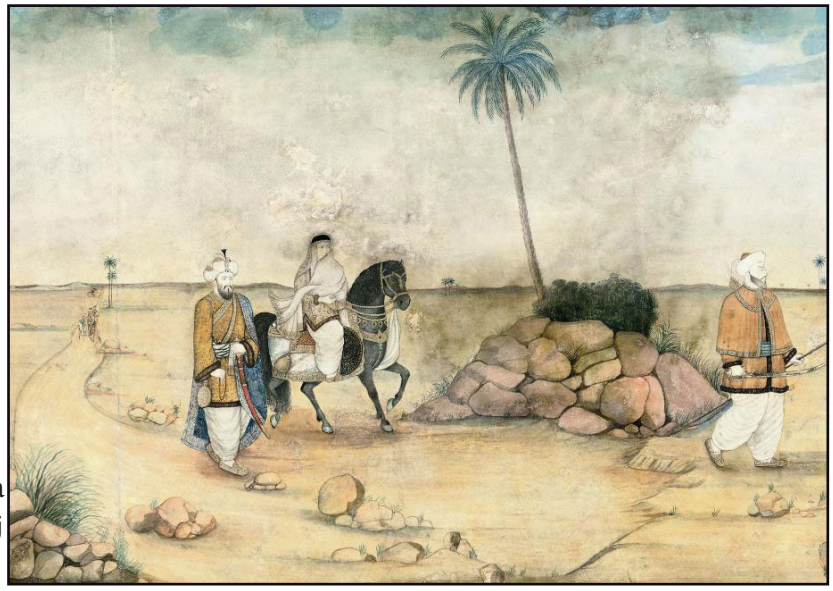
The world is his who exerts himself. Fail not to commit yourself strenuously to meet every emergency…and through God's grace you will defeat your enemies, take their territory and make your friends happy by overthrowing their foes. Do not fail to make the most of an opportunity that presents itself. Laziness and ease do not go well with kingship.

Above: *A painting of Babur in coversation with Humayun. This image was painted in Delhi around 1650 CE.*

Inherit - From Latin *in* + *heres* (heir)
Ambitious - From Latin *ambitiosus* (eager to win favor). In turn from Latin *ambitio* (to go around)

Defeat of Humayun by Sher Shah

Sher Shah was a powerful Afghan ruler who had previously served under the Lodi dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate. He had been the governor of Bihar and had gone on to serve as a commander in Babur's army. However, he had no intention of serving Humayun. Using a strategy of cunning and guile, he managed to defeat Humayun decisively at the Battle of Chausa (1539) and the Battle of Kannauj (1540).



Above: *A late 17th century painting of Humayun fleeing to Persia with his preganant wife (the future mother of Akbar)*

After his defeat at the hands of Sher Shah, Humayun was forced to flee into exile. Him, his family, and his followers, all had to cross the scorching hot Thar desert on their way to Persia. This was certainly the lowest point in Humayun's life. There are many stories about this period in his life recounted by various sources. According to one story, Humayun had been lent a horse to ride by an officer, but as the journey got tougher, the officer took his horse back, leaving Humayun to walk.

Above*: Humayun and his brothers in a landscape. This image is a part of a larger collection of paintings made during the reign of Humayun (1530-40 and 1555-56). Many of the other paintings from this collection are missing, making this one of the oldest datable Mughal paintings.*

Cunning - able to get what you want in a clever way, especially by tricking or cheating somebody (*adj.*)
Fresco - a picture that is painted on a wall while the plaster is still wet (*noun*)

Case Study: Humayun in Exile in Isfahan, Iran.

Above: *Humayun (to the left) is welcomed by the Safavid Persian ruler, Shah Tahmasp, at whose court he finds refuge in 1543. The painting is in the hall of* ***Chehel Sotun pavillion****, completed in 1647. This is in the city of Isfahan, Iran.*

Below: *The main hall of Chehel Sotun is a three dome structure, with each dome being surrounded by six paintings. Each painting is a large scale fresco painted on ceramic with Persian miniatures. Up until then, this style of art was only used in book illustrations. The decoration and the frescoes of the main hall were finished in 1647, under the reign of Shah Abbas II to record key events. The bottom-left painting depicts the arrival of Humayun.*

Cunning - From Old Norse *kunna* (to know)

Fresco - From Italian *affresco* (origninally *af fresco*) (on the fresh)

2.3 Sher Shah Suri and the interlude of Afghan rule

Sher Shah had originally worked as governor of Bihar. He was an excellent administrator and he established many noticeable reforms in the administration of the empire. Under his reign, the empire was able to construct much of the needed administrative apparatus that had been missing under Babur.

Central Administration

Sher Shah started a system of centralized rule. Departments, headed by ministers, looked after different matters of the state. However, Sher Shah kept the ministers in check with a spy system.

Provincial administration

The empire was divided into 47 provinces. These were then further divided into districts and villages.

Military Administration

He established a large permanent standing army and personally oversaw the appointment and training of the soldiers. He maintained descriptive rolls of soldiers (chehra) and continued the practice of branding horses (dagh)

Transport

He built the Grand Trunk Road which connected regions in modern day Bangladesh to Pakistan. He planted numerous trees along either side of the road to ensure shade for travellers and built rest houses for the travellers as well.

***Above**: A 20th century oil painting of Sher Shah.*

However, after just 5 years in power, Sher Shah died in 1545 CE in an accidental explosion. He was succeeded by his son, Islam Shah Suri.

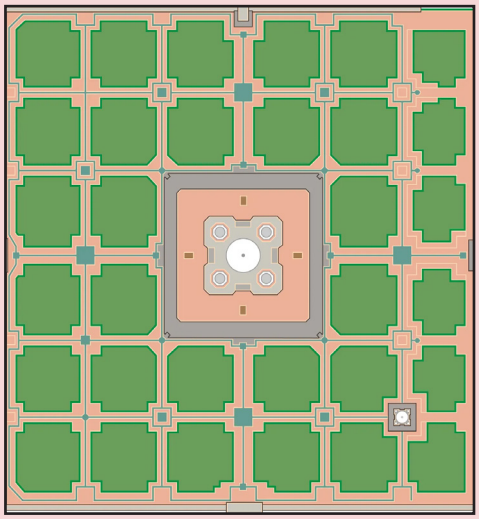
Reconquest of India by Humayun

The death of Sher Shah greatly weakened his empire, and Humayun saw this as a perfect opportunity to regain his lost kingdom. Humayun gathered support and assembled an army to take back India.

In 1555 CE, Humayun conquered Agra and Delhi, and established himself as the emperor of India. However, before he could begin to consolidate his fractured empire, he died after falling from the stairs of his library in 1556 CE. He was succeeded by his son Akbar.

Centralize - to give the control of a country or an organization to a group of people in one particular place (*verb*)
Fractured - (of a society, an organization, etc.) split into several parts so that it no longer functions or exists (*adj*.)

Humayun's Tomb



***Above**: A layout of Humayun's tomb. The tomb is in the center and is surrounded by geometrically arranged pathways and gardens in the Persian style.*

***Right:** Humayun's library. This is where Humayun fell down the stairs and died.*

***Below:** Humayun's tomb in Delhi. Humayun was the first Mughal emperor to be buried in Delhi. The huge tomb with a height of 154 feet and width of 299 feet is mainly built in red sandstone while white marble has been used for the double layered dome.*

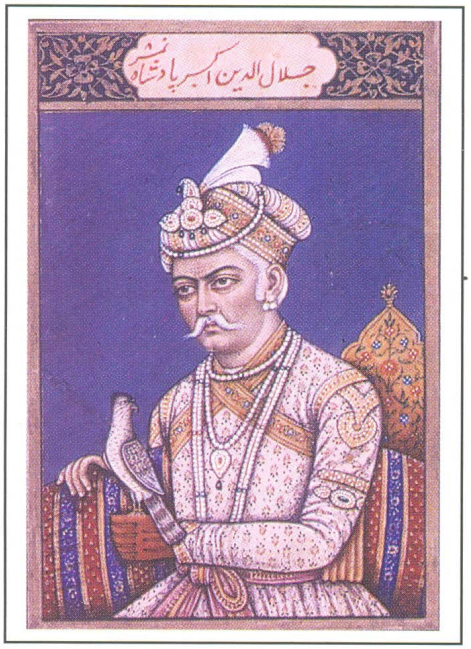
The tomb was built by his widow, Biga Begum (Hajji Begum), in 1569-70, 14 years after his death, at a cost of 1.5 million rupees. The architect was Mirak Mirza Ghiyath. It was later used for the burial of various members of the ruling family and contains some 150 graves.

Centralize - From Latin *centrum* (center)

Fractured - From Latin *frangere* (to break)

2.4 Akbar

Akbar the Great was born on 14 October 1542, at the Rajput Fortress of Umerkot in Sindh. He was the son of Humayun and his wife Hamida Banu Begum. Akbar was born at a time when his parents were in exile. As you will remember, Humayun was fleeing to Persia at the time after his disastrous defeats to Sher Shah at the Battles of Chausa and Kannauj.



Right: *An 18th century miniature of the emperor Akbar*
Below: *The Rajput fortress of Umerkot in Sindh (in modern day Pakistan). This is where Akbar was born.*

Akbar spent his entire childhood learning how to fight and hunt. He had no interest in learning how to read and write. However, Akbar was the only Moghul Emperor who was illiterate and still had an interest in knowledge.

Akbar was made king at the age of 13, after the death of his father. Akbar was with Bairam Khan at the time of his father's passing and Bairam was made Regent, as Akbar was too young. On many occasions Bairam led campaigns on Akbar's behalf to expand the kingdom.

Hemu, the Hindu minister of an Afghan Prince, Adil Shah, was waiting for a chance to defeat Akbar. Hemu attacked the kingdom of Delhi and emerged victorious, crowning himself ruler of Delhi. However, Akbar was determined not to let the kingdom slip away from his family again. Under the leadership of Bairam Khan, he gathered his armies and prepared to take back Delhi.

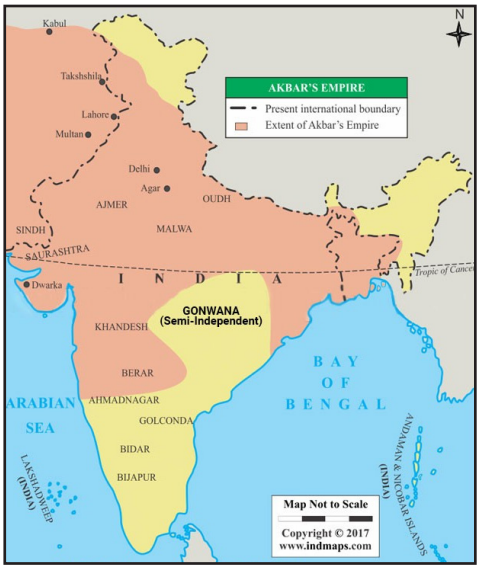
Illiterate - not knowing how to read or write (*adj.*)

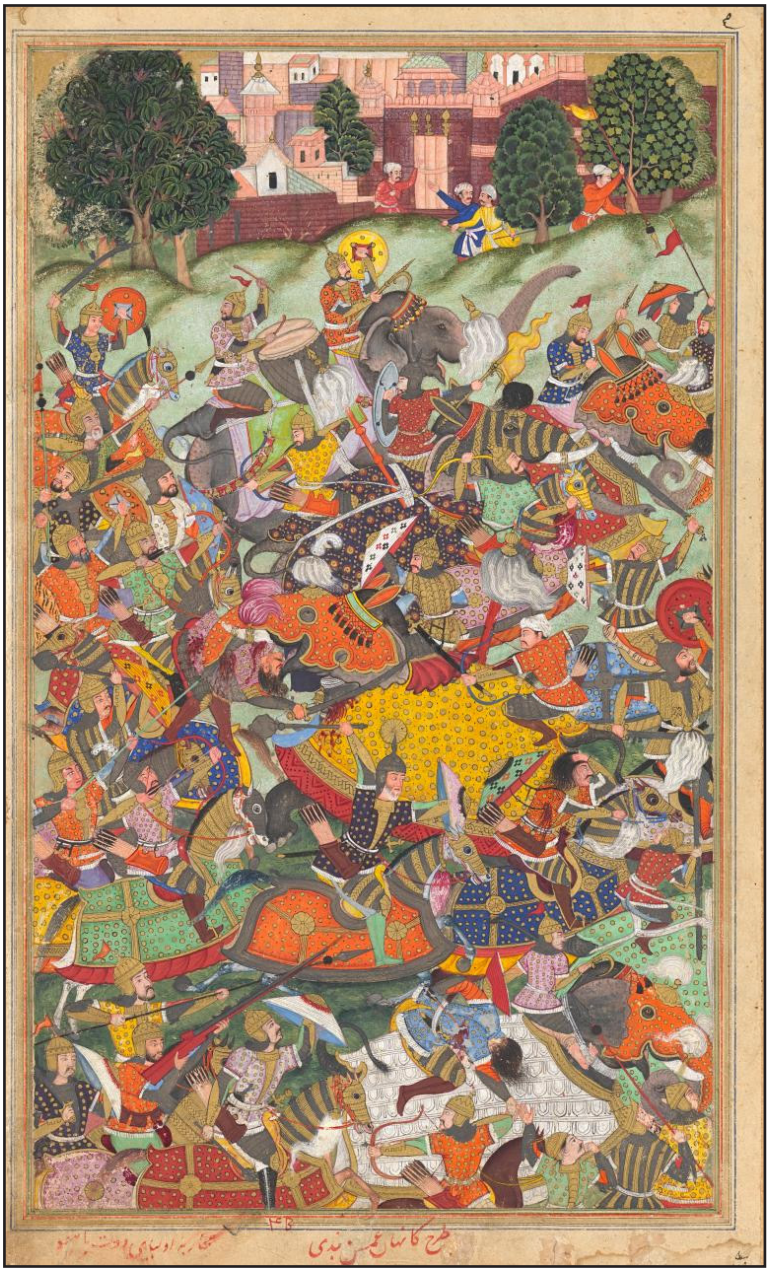
Scathing - criticizing somebody or something very severely in a way that shows no respect (*adj.*)

Second Battle of Panipat:

Akbar launched a scathing attack in the Second Battle of Panipat. The two armies fought valiantly and it seemed as though the Moghuls were fighting a losing battle until an arrow hit Hemu's eye and he collapsed. Hemu's men thought that he was dead and put down their weapons, accepting defeat. Akbar became king again.

As Akbar grew older, he won many more battles and added more regions to his kingdom, stretching from the Indo-Gangetic Basin to Kashmir and Afghanistan, all the way to Bengal in the east and part of Deccan in the south.





Above: *A map showing the extent of the empire under Akbar (shown in red).*

Top-Right: *A painting titled "The Defeat of Hemu at the Second Battle of Panipat". This painting was completed in the 1590's and is one of the 116 painting in the Akbarnama.*

The Akbarnama is the official chronicle of the reign of Akbar. is a collection of texts and illustrated manuscripts, written in Farsi (Persian) by the court historian and biographer Abu'l-Fazl, and commissioned by Akbar himself.

Social Reforms of Akbar:

Upon ascending to the throne, Akbar made the following reforms.

- He ordered the banning of Sati.
- He discouraged child marriage. He raised the age of marriage to 14 for girls and 16 for boys.
- He abolished the system of enslaving the women and children of defeated kingdoms.
- Akbar abolished the system of jizya (the tax levied on non-Muslims)

Illiterate - From Latin *in* (not) + *literatus* (furnished with letters)

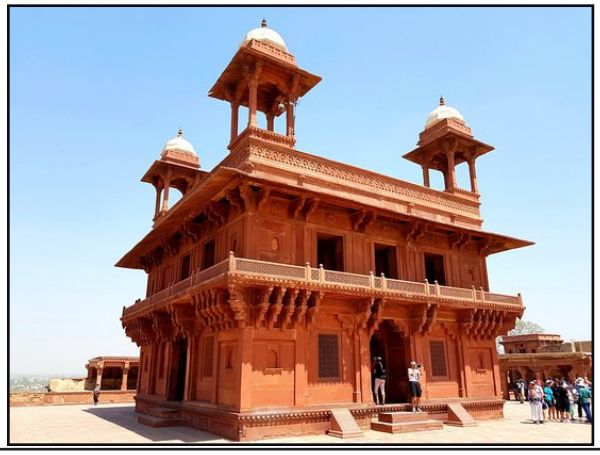
Scathing - From Old Norse *skathi* (damaging/ scorching)

Policies of Akbar:

Throughout the late 1500's, Akbar expressed a desire to unify the many diverse people living across his empire. His ideas would go on to help the Islamic Mughal state transform into a more secular one.

Above: *Akbar the Great holds a religious assembly in the Ibadat Khana; the two men dressed in black are the Jesuit missionaries Rodolfo Acquaviva and Francisco Henriques. This is an illustration from the Akbarnama and was completed around 1605 CE.*

Below: *A structure, believed to be the Ibadat Khana, in Fatehpur Sikri.*



Religious policies of Akbar

Akbar realized that in order to govern a country as diverse as India, the empire needed to have a more broad-minded outlook. He had to be tolerant towards his Hindu subjects. One of his first acts after becoming emperor was to abolish jizya. He also banned forceful conversions of prisoners of war to Islam.

Akbar encouraged debate and discourse between different religions. He built the Ibadat Khana (The Hall of Worship) for this purpose. He believed in the idea of universal peace, and he thought that there were elements of goodness in all religions.

In 1579 CE, Akbar passed an important law called mazhar. This law allowed him to choose between various interpretations of Islamic law. This gave him a lot of power over the Ulema and it helped him to consolidate the power of the emperor.

In 1582 CE, Akbar created his own religious order called the Din-i-Ilahi (Divine Faith). This wasn't a religion in the normal sense; there were no rituals that needed to be performed, no holy books, and no temples or mosques. His religion was mainly a code of moral conduct.

Some of the main features of the Din-i-Ilahi were the belief in one God, and the acceptance of the emperor as a representative of God on earth. Akbar did not force this religion on anyone. As such, very few people accepted it, and the Din-i-Ilahi came to an end after Akbar's death in 1605 CE.

Interpretation - the particular way in which something is understood or explained (*noun*)
Administration - the activities that are done in order to plan, organize and run a business, school or other institution (*noun*)

The Mansabdari System

The Mansabdari system was introduced by Akbar to allow him to more effectively control his army and the administration of his nobles. The word mansab in this context refers to an "office" or a "rank". A mansabdar was a person who had a certain number of soldiers under his command.

Every official in the government was given a mansab rank, based on how important their job was. The lowest mansab rank commanded 10 soldiers and the highest mansab ranks commanded upwards of 10,000 soldiers. The top three mansabs were reserved for the royal family.

In the later years of his reign, Akbar subdivided the Mansabdari ranking into two categories, Zat and Sawar. According to Akbar's system, 'Zat' indicated the number of soldiers under the Mansabdar, whereas the 'Sawar' indicated the number of horsemen under him.

- If the number of sawar was equal to the number of Zat, then the officer was a 1st Class Mansabdar
- If the number of sawar was more than half the number of zat, then the officer was a 2nd Class Mansabdar.
- If the number of sawar was less than half the number of zat, then the officer was a 3rd Class Mansabdar.

Above: *A painting of imperial court guards (shown on the left) and court nobles (shown on the right). These nobles would have all had mansabdari rankings based on their status and the number of troops under them. This painting is from the Padshahnama, the official chronicle of* ***Shah Jahan's*** *reign. This painting was completed between 1656 and 1657 CE.*

Interpretation - From Latin *interpretatio* (to explain)

Administration - From Latin *administrare* (to manage/ control)

Educational Work by Akbar:

Despite the fact that the emperor Akbar was illiterate, he was deeply interested in knowledge and debate. He tried to promote religious peace throughout his empire by steering education away from religious instruction, and focusing on secular subjects such as mathematics, history, and astronomy.

Akbar also established a translation department which translated numerous books into Persian. Some of the most famous texts that were translated include the Vedas, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Bible. This gave many people in the middle class an insight into the literature of various cultures.

Death of the emperor Akbar

In 1605, Akbar fell very ill. During his final years, his son, Jahangir, rebelled against him and tried to claim the throne. Akbar captured him, but forgave him, and declared him the rightful heir to the throne.

Akbar would die soon afterwards. He had managed to bring parts of East, West, North as well as South India under his rule. Akbar's rule is greatly noted for the wealth of learning and culture that existed in his time. He was also admired for his bravery and wisdom.

Above: *An illustration from the Persian translation of Mahabharata composed under the reign of Akbar. The translation was called the Razmnama (the Book of War). In Persian, "Razm" means war, and "nama" means history or tale. The illustration above depicts Arjuna taking part in the Matsya Vedh (Piercing Fish eye) competition to win the hand of Draupadi as his wife.*

Food in the Court of Akbar

Salma Hussain, a celebrated food historian notes that the hakim (royal physician) planned the menu, making sure to include medicinally beneficial ingredients. For instance, each grain of rice for the biryani was coated with silver oil, which aided digestion.

In A History of Food In India (2014) by Colleen Taylor Sen says that "the palace chickens were fed by hand with pellets flavored with saffron and rosewater, and massaged daily with musk oil and sandalwood." Ice, used for cooling drinks and making frozen desserts, was brought daily from the Himalayas by an elaborate system of couriers."

Akbar was a vegetarian thrice a week and had his own kitchen garden which he nourished with rosewater so that the vegetables would smell fragrant when cooked. Some of the dishes prepared with gusto during his time were Sanbusas or Samosas, and Halim (a meat stew with vegetables and pulses added).

Above: *A 17th century illustration depicting a standard feast in the Mughal court*

Beneficial - improving a situation; having a helpful or useful effect (*adj.*)

Ascend - to rise; to go up; to climb up (*verb*)

2.5 Jahangir

Jahangir was Akbar's eldest son. He inherited a rich empire that was well-administered and well-organized.

Conquests:

Jahangir launched several conquests during his reign. He mainly focused on territories that Akbar had been unable to conquer. He launched several attacks against the Rajput kings of Rajasthan. He also began expeditions south into the Deccan, and captured the fort of Ahmednagar (one of the Deccan Sultanates).

Arrival of Europeans:

European traders and companies began arriving in India for the first time in medieval history under the reign of Jahangir. The Dutch, Portuguese and English, all tried to get permission to establish trade agreements with the Mughals. After an incident in which the Portugues attacked Mughal ships, Jahangir gave the English permission to set up a trade factory at Surat in Gujarat.

Above: *An illustration from an early 19th century manuscript of Jahangir. This painting is presumed to be copied from an earlier painting that does not survive.*

The Execution of Sikh Guru Arjan Dev

Jahangir infamously ordered the arrest of the fifth Sikh Guru Arjan Dev and had him tortured and killed in prison. He sacked Guru Arjan Dev's lands and imprisoned his sons as Jahangir suspected him of plotting a rebellion. Jahngir viewed the Sikh community as a threat, and as such, had the Sikh Guru killed. Guru Arjan Dev was the first Sikh Guru to be killed by the Mughals, but he would not be the last.

Above: *A modern-day illustration of the martrydom of Guru Arjan Dev who was tortured and killed by Jahangir.*

Origin of Jahangir's Name:

Jahangir was born with the name Salim. The name Jahangir is a Persian name that he adopted upon ascending to the throne. Jahangir means "Conqueror of the World" in Persian. It was very common for Mughal rulers to change their name upon ascending to the throne. In Persian, Jahan means world or universe, while Gir means conqueror.

Beneficial - From Latin *beneficium* (favor/ kindness). In turn from Latin *bene* (good).
Ascend - From Latin *scandere* (to climb)

Nur Jahan - The Wife of Jahangir

Above: *A painting of Nur Jahan holding a portrait of her husband, the emperor Jahangir. This painting is attributed to 1627 CE, the year that Jahangir died. It is possible that this painting was made after his death, in commemoration of his reign.*

Right*: An idealized portrait of Nur Jahan painted around 1840 CE in Delhi. This painting was done in a style of art known as the Company school of art. It was a style of miniature painting that developed in India in the second half of the 18th century in response to the tastes of the British serving with the East India Company.*

Below: *A silver coin minted in the 1620's showing the bearing the name of Nur Jahan. This is significant as Nur Jahan was the only Mughal queen in the history of the empire to have her name inscribed on coins. She was the first queen since Raziya Sultan to have coins made in her name.*

In 1611 CE, Jahangir took his twentieth wife, a Persian widow, who he gave the title of Nur Jahan (Light of the World). Nur Jahan was very beautiful, but she was also very bold and ambitious. When Jahangir's health began to decline in 1622 CE, Nur Jahan became the real power in the Mughal court. Many decisions of the court were taken only with the approval of Nur Jahan.

Jahangir continued to engage in many vices like alcohol and opium. Because of this, Nur Jahan became the de-facto ruler of the empire. As a matter of fact at one point, she even had coins struck which bore her name! She began appointing relatives to important positions at court.

In the final years of the reign of Jahangir, there was a power struggle between Nur Jahan and Jahangir's son - Shah Jahan. After Jahangir eventually died in 1627 CE, Shah Jahan managed to seize power and Nur Jahan went on to live a quiet life of seclusion in her palace.

Connoisseur - an expert on matters involving the judgment of beauty, quality or skill in art, food or music (*noun*)

Divinity - the quality of being a god or like God or a god (*noun*)

Jahangir - A Patron of the Arts

Jahangir loved art and architecture, and it is evident from his autobiography, the 'Jahangirnama'. He jotted down the descriptions of flora and fauna that he encountered, and other aspects of daily life

Jahangir was a connoisseur of art and he worked hard to preserve paintings from Akbar's period. Paintings created under his reign were closely cataloged, dated and even signed, providing scholars with fairly accurate ideas as to when and in what context many of the pieces were created.

The Jesuits had brought with them various books, engravings, and paintings, and both Akbar and Jahangir studied those very closely. Jahangir began incorporating elements of western art into the paintings of the Mughal court. Jahangir was proud of the ability of his court painters and he revolutionized Mughal art. A collection at the British Museum in London contains 74 drawings of Indian portraits dating from the time of Jahangir, including a portrait of the emperor himself.

Above: *A painting from around 1620 CE depicting the emperor Akbar with a lion and a lamb. This work shows many of the European influences on Mughal art in Jahangir's court*

Right: *A painting titled "**Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings**"*

This is a painting done in the miniature style by Mughal court painter Bichitr around 1615-18 CE. The Mughal emperor Jahangir is shown holding court on top of an ornate hourglass throne. The golden hourglass, European in design, highlights the global contact between Europeans and the Mughal Empire.

The halo around Jahangir's head reinforces the emperor's divinity. On the left-hand side of the painting are four men attending Jahangir's court. Moving from top to bottom the four individuals are a Sufi saint, the Shah of Persia, King James I of England, and then a self-portrait of Bichitr (the painter). The Sufi holy man commands Jahangir's undivided attention, despite the presence of the other two powerful monarchs. This further highlights the emperor's strong religious connections.

Bichitr's depiction of the Shah and King James I situated well below Jahangir's throne emphasizes the power of the Mughal Empire as Jahangir's imposing figure looms over the other monarchs.

Connoisseur - From Old Frnech *conoistre* (to know)

Divinity - From Latin *divinus* (belonging to a deity)

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Sample Questions

Brief Answers:

1. Explain the process through which Babur ended up as an exile with no kingdom. [3]
2. Explain why Babur's distribution of jagirs posed a problem to Humayun when he ascended to the throne. [3]

Long Answers:

3. Explain the role that each of the Mughal emperors, from Babur to Akbar, played in the development of the imperial administration system. [5]
4. Describe the development of the arts under Jahangir's reign. [5]

Bibliography - From Ancient Greek βιβλιογραφία
bibliographía (the act or habit of writing books)

Chapter 3

The Mughals: Shah Jahan to Aurangzeb

3.1 Shah Jahan
3.2 Aurangzeb
3.3 The Advent of the East India Company
3.4 The Battle of Plassey

3.1 Shah Jahan

Shah Jahan dreamed of further conquest and expansion of the empire. However, he is best remembered for the monuments constructed under his reign, which have a distinct architectural style. It was under his reign that Mughal architecture and culture flourished and reached its peak. For this reason, his reign is considered the Golden Age of Mughal Architecture.

Right: *A painting of the emperor Shah Jahan on horseback. This painting was made around 1630 CE by the famous Mughal painter Payag. Payag worked for the emperors Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan over the course of a remarkably long seventy year career.*

When Shah Jahan came to power, there was a revolt in the Deccan. Shah Jahan crushed the revolt, forcing the states of Bijapur and Golconda to accept partial Mughal control. The Sultanate of Ahmednagar was completely conquered and added to the Mughal empire. These Deccan states can be seen in southern part of the Indian subcontinent in the map to the left .

Left: *A map depicting the extent of the Mughal empire in the early 1600's. The territories shown in orange were the remaining Deccan Sultanates. The states of Bijapur and Golconda were forced to accept Mughal supremacy under the reign of Shah Jahan. The northernmost Deccan Sultanate of Ahmednagar was completely annexed and added to the Mughal empire.*

Flourish - to develop quickly and become successful or common (*verb*)

Attendant - a person whose job is to serve or help people/ a person (*noun*)

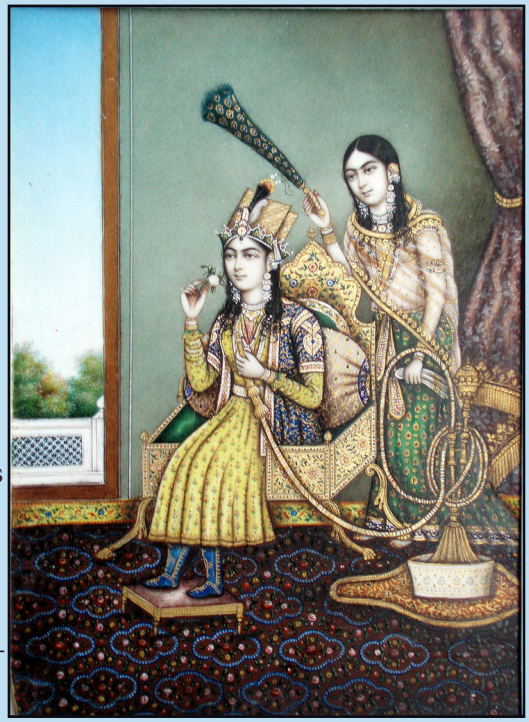
Monuments of Shah Jahan

Shah Jahan constructed many famous monuments during his lifetime. Though the most famous structure is the Taj Mahal, he also constructed the Jama Masjid, one of the largest mosques in India.

Shah Jahan built a new city, Shahjahanabad, and shifted the capital from Agra to his new city in 1639 CE. Shahjahanabad is present-day Old Delhi. You can still see several monuments from the time of Shah Jahan and later Mughal emperors when walking through the streets of Old Delhi.

Case Study: The Taj Mahal

Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, lost his wife Mumtaz Mahal on June 17, 1631. He was inconsolable and envisaged a memorial that would befit his love.



Today, the Taj Mahal is listed as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. But, this magnificent white marbled tomb has its own story to tell. It is the final resting place of Arjuman Banu, also know as Mumtaz Mahal.

Born on April 6, 1593, Mumtaz Mahal was the daughter of Abdul Hasan Asaf Khan, a Persian nobleman and the niece of the Empress Nur Jahan. When she was 14, she was engaged to marry Prince Khurram, also known as Shah Jahan. They were married in 1612.

Mumtaz Mahal travelled with Shah Jehan and even accompanied him on his military campaigns. Shah Jahan trusted her greatly.

Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan had 14 children, including Dara Shikoh, Shah Shuja, Roshnara Begum, Jahanara Begum and the future emperor Aurangzeb.

Top Right: *A painting of Mumtaz Mahal, the beloved wife of Shah Jahan, sitting with an attendant. This painting dates to around 1860 CE and is done in the Company style of art. This painting is a miniature and is 16 cm by 10 cm in size.*

Above: *A computer generated model of the Taj Mahal complex. The entrance (shown on the left) leads to a grid of geometrically arranged gardens in the Persian style with water in between them. Mumtaz Mahal is buried in the main structure of the Taj Mahal. The diagram above shows a cross-section.*

Flourish - From Latin *flor* (flower)

Attendant - From Old French *atendre* (to give one's attention to)

Case Study: The Taj Mahal

On June 17, 1631 while she was giving birth to their 14th child, she died in Burhanpur, in Madhya Pradesh. Shah Jahan was devastated by her death. He went into mourning that lasted a year. When he returned, his hair had turned white and his face was ravaged with grief and sadness.

He had her body exhumed and taken back to Agra in a golden coffin, escorted by their son. In Agra, her body was buried in a small building on the banks of the Yamuna.

Shah Jahan then began planning a royal tomb for his wife. The construction of the mausoleum began in 1632 and was completed in 1648. This tomb is made of white marble and is a showpiece of Mughal architecture. It is supposed to represent Shah Jahan's vision of Mumtaz Mahal's home in paradise. The architecture of the Taj Mahal combines elements of Islamic, Indian, Persian, Ottoman and Turkish styles of art. Thousands of artisans and craftsmen were employed during the construction of this monument.

Material from all over India and Asia were used to construct the Taj Mahal and over 1,000 elephants were used to carry building material. The white marble was sourced from Makrana in Rajasthan, turquoise from Tibet, lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, jade and crystal from China and sapphire from Sri Lanka and Arabia.

Unfortunately, the Taj Mahal is fast losing its splendor. The monument's white marble is turning brownish yellow. The discoloration is largely due to airborne particulate pollution emitted by nearby industrial sites. It also comes from excrement left by insects that breed in the nearby Yamuna River, which harbors considerable waste. In 2008, the Indian government planned a massive restoration project. The massive undertaking included scrubbing the marble exterior and restoring the massive red sandstone main gates. The restoration was expected to take several years.

However, almost a decade later, very little progress had been made. On 12 July 2018, India's Supreme Court slammed the country's federal government for its "lethargy and apathy" in taking steps to protect the Taj Mahal. As of 2022, there still remains much work to be done to save the monument. The Supreme Court in September 2022, directed the Agra Development Authority to stop all commercial activities within a 500-meter radius of the Taj Mahal to slow down the rate of decay.

Top: *A view of the Taj Mahal from above. The Yamuna river can be seen behind.*
Above: *The backside of the Taj Mahal. The pollution of the Yamuna has reached dangerous levels in the past decades and is accentuating the decay of the structure.*

Devastated - extremely upset and shocked (*adj.*)

Defeated - having been beaten in a battle or contest (*adj.*)

Case Study: A Painting of Shah Jahan's Court

Mughal art depicting the imperial court of Shah Jahan. Note the presence of the symbols that represented the Timurid imperial authority.

The Mughal throne (Awrang) upon which he is seated. The umbrella (Chatr) that represents his role as the "Shadow of God" in the world. The sun emblem (Shamsah) is depicted behind his head signifying his semi-divine status. If we were to zoom out, we would probably see the Mughal imperial standards as well.

Right: *A painting from the Padshahnama depicting the emperor Shah Jahan holding court. This painting was completed in 1636 CE. Many of the symbols of Mughal imperial authority are shown in this painting, making it a valuable source of information.*

End of Shah Jahan's Reign

In the year 1657 CE, Shah Jahan fell seriously ill. Thinking he would die, his sons went to war with each other for the right to rule.

Aurangzeb, the third son of Shah Jahan, defeated his brothers, and imprisoned his elderly father in a palace overlooking the Taj Mahal.

This marked the end of Shah Jahan's reign. Despite the unfortunate end of his reign, he is remembered for the many architectural structures that he constructed during is years on the throne.

Right: *A painting titled "The Passing of Shah Jahan". This is a Miniature painting, painted by the Indian artist Abanindranath Tagore in 1902 CE. The painting depicts the fifth Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan staring at the Taj Mahal on his deathbed, with his daughter Jahanara Begum at his feet.*

Devastated - From Latin *vastare* (to lay waste to)

Defeated - From Old French *desfait* (undone). In turn from Medieval Latin *disfacere* (to undo)

3.2 Aurangzeb

Upon defeating his brothers and imprisoning his father, Aurangzeb declared himself the rightful ruler of the Mughal Empire and formally took the throne in 1658 CE. He kept his father under house arrest in Agra Fort until Shah Jahan's death in 1666 CE.

Upon ascending to the throne, Aurangzeb took the titles of Alamgir (conqueror of the world), Badshah (Emperor) and Ghazi (holy warrior). Over the course of his 50 year reign, he would expand the Mughal empire to its largest territorial extent. His reign can be generally divided into two sections: his Early Reign, in which he was based in North India, and his Later Reign, in which he operated out of the Deccan.

Above: *A painting from the 18th century using opaque watercolour and gold on paper, depicting the emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707), clad in a scarlet robe with a jewelled cyclindrical headdress with heron feathers, a curved sword, dagger and strings of pearls. He holds the mouthpiece of a hookah.*

Early Reign

For the first 24 years of his reign, Aurangzeb was stationed in North India and was busy quashing revolts. He faced rebellions from Assammese kings, Afghan tribes, and the Satnamis. The main reason for these revolts were the religious policies imposed by Aurangzeb. He reintroduced the controversial jizya tax - a tax that all non-Muslims needed to pay. This tax had been abolished by Akbar more than 100 years ago. He also maintained strict Islamic policies and was not as tolerant of other religions as his predecessors.

While these revolts took up most of his early reign, the biggest threat to his power came from the Sikhs, the Rajputs and the Marathas. His policies had angered them greatly and many of even the most loyal Mughal allies turned on him. The Sikh community was particularly incensed by his decision to execute Guru Tegh Bahadur for his refusal to convert to Islam.

Left: *An 18th century painting from the Udaipur museum in Rajasthan depcting an alliance between the rulers of Jodhpur, Amber, and Udaipur against the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. This alliance and the subsequent rebellion was triggered by Aurangzeb's policies.*

Controversial - causing a lot of angry public discussion and disagreement (*adj.*)

Summon - to order somebody to appear in court (*verb*)

The Execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur

Guru Tegh Bahadur attracted a huge number of devotees and followers. This is said to have worried the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb greatly. Guru Tegh Bahadur also promised to protect Kashmiri pandits, who were being persecuted by Aurangzeb. This led to him being summoned to Delhi where he stood trial before the emperor. On the 24th of November 1675, the Guru was publicly beheaded on the orders of Aurangzeb at Chandni Chowk in Delhi. Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib was built in 1783 at the place where he was beheaded.

Above: *An 18th century painting of the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur and his followers.*

His young son Gobind, who was only nine when his father was killed, became the tenth and the last Sikh Guru. His father's brutal murder had a profound effect on him. Guru Gobind Singh went on to become the founder of the Khalsa (the Sikh community) and challenged the authority of the Mughals.

Below: *The Gurudwara Sis Ganj Sahib. This Gurudwara stands in Delhi at the site where the Sikh Guru was executed*

Aurangzeb also passed orders that the whole family of any person who goes near the deceased Guru's body will be killed. Despite this, a loyal Sikh took the Guru's head back to Anandpur in Punjab where it was cremated. The Gurdwara Sisganj Sahib was later built to mark this site. According to tradition, another loyal Sikh took the body back to his home in Delhi and cremated it; a Sikh shrine, Gurdwara Rakabgunj (near the Parliament house in Delhi) marks the spot of the body's cremation.

Left: *A modern artistic depiction of Bhai Jaita Ji, a companion of Guru Tegh Bahadur taking the head of the deceased Guru back to Anandpur in Punjab, despite the orders of Aurangzeb.*

Controversial - From Latin *contrōversia* (debate/ contention)
Summon - From Latin *sub* (secretly) + *monere* (to warn). Interestingly, the word *monere* is also a key part of the etymology of money.

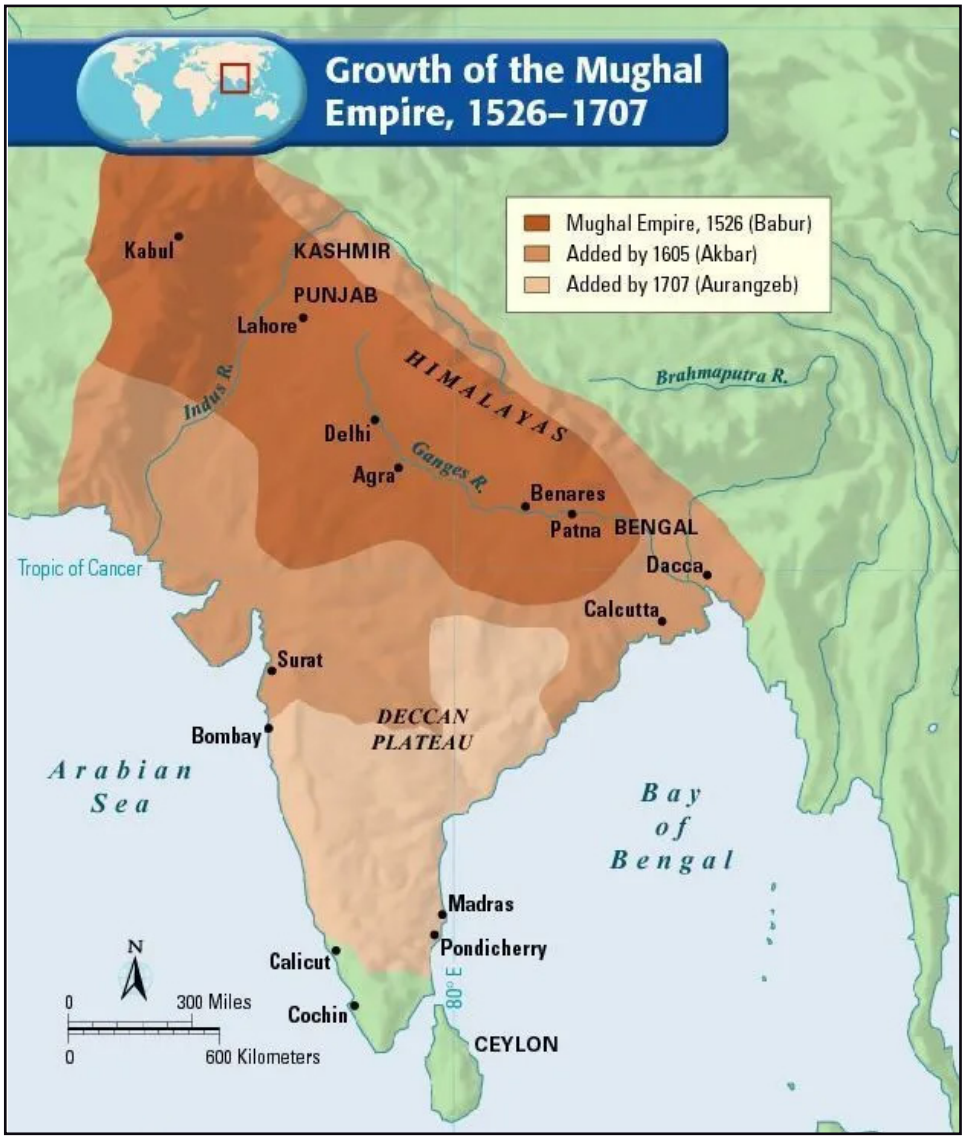
Later Reign

For the next 26 years of Aurangzeb's reign, he focused on conquering the Deccan. The process of establishing Mughal influence in the Deccan had been ongoing for almost a century, but it was Aurangzeb who launched military expeditions with a renewed fervor.

Aurangzeb himself traveled to the Deccan in 1681 CE and set up his base in Aurangabad. He would spend the remainder of his rule here, fighting with the Marathas and the Sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda. He would never return to the North and would stay in the Deccan till his death in 1707 CE.

During his time in the Deccan, Aurangzeb managed to defeat and annex the Sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda, bringing an end to the final remaining Deccan Sultanates. He also fought with the Marathas, and even managed to capture and kill Shivaji's son, Sambhaji, in 1689 CE. However, despite this, he was never able to fully suppress the Marathas.

Even in his old age, he refused to enter into peace negotiations with the Marathas. Following the death of Aurangzeb, the Marathas maintained their independent position and formed a center of power in India through the 18th century until their final defeat at the hands of the British in 1818 CE.



Right: *A map illustrating the phases of Mughal territorial expansion. The section of the map shown in the lightest shade of brown (in the south) represents the conquests of Aurangzeb during the second half of his reign.*

Austere - simple and plain; without any decorations (*adj*.)

Splendor - grand and impressive beauty (*noun*)

Effects of Aurangzeb's Reign:

Aurangzeb was an austere and devout Muslim. He tried his best to live his life according to the instructions of the Quran. There was not much development in art or culture during his reign as he stopped much of the royal patronage that these fields had enjoyed under previous rulers. He disapproved of both music and representational art. He even went so far as to ban the playing of music in court.

Despite the fact that Aurangzeb had conquered so much territory and expanded the size of the Mughal empire, he also inadvertently triggered the empire's decline. His reign marked both the high point as well as the beginning of the end for the Mughal empire. Some of the effects of his reign were as follows:

Above: *A painting of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb from 1890 CE. In the painting he is depicted reading the Quran. There are many paintings of Aurangzeb either reading or writing the Quran - a clear result of his attempt to be perceived as a virtuous emperor.*

- The Mughal treasury was greatly drained because of the incessant conflicts and wars.
- There was a rise of corruption in North India because of how long the emperor had been away
- There were many rebellions by nobles and soldiers in the Deccan
- The power of the Jats and Sikhs in north India was strengthened, owing the prolonged absence of the emperor.

Excerpts from the last letters of Aurangzeb to his sons (1707)

"I came alone and I go as a stranger. I do not know who I am, nor what I have been doing"

"I have sinned terribly, and I do not know what punishment awaits me."

"I entirely lacked in ruler-ship and protecting the people. My precious life has passed in vain. God is here, but my dimmed eyes do not see his splendor"

A story goes that Aurangzeb's last words were 'Azma fasad baq!' which is said to mean '**After me, the chaos.**' The Mughal empire began to decline immediately after the death of Aurangzeb. A series of weak successors followed and there were multiple civil wars between brothers for the throne. None of the rulers that followed were capable of holding the empire together. Within a matter of decades, much of the territory that Aurangzeb had conquered had been lost. Over the next century and a half, the Mughal empire would disintegrate, until, by the end, it only covered Delhi and the surrounding regions.

Above: *The austere lifestyle and deeply Islamic beliefs of Aurangzeb are reflected in his modest open-air grave on the outskirts of Aurangabad.*

Austere - From Greek *austeros* (severe)

Splendor - From Latin *splendere* (to shine)

An Outline of the Major Campaigns and Conquests of the Mughal Emperors

Babur 1526-1530 CE (Left)

1526 CE – defeated Ibrahim Lodi and established control over Agra and Delhi.

(Right) **Humayun 1530-1556 CE**

Sher Khan defeated Humayun, forcing him to flee to Iran. In Iran, Humayun received help from the Safavid Shah. He recaptured Delhi in 1555 CE but died in an accident the following year.

Akbar 1556-1605 CE (Left)

Akbar was 13 years old when he became the emperor. He rapidly conquered Bengal, Central India, Rajasthan and Gujarat. Thereafter, he also conquered Afghanistan, Kashmir and portions of the Deccan.

Jahangir 1605-1627 CE (above)

Military campaigns started by Akbar continued. No major conquests.

Shah Jahan 1627-1658 CE (Left Below) Mughal campaigns continued in the Deccan. He faced many revolts by nobles and chiefs of his empire. In 1657-1658 CE, there was a conflict over succession amongst Shah Jahan's sons. Aurangzeb was victorious and his three brothers were killed. Shah Jahan was imprisoned for the rest of his life in Agra.

(Right) **Aurangzeb 1658-1707 CE**

Tried to conquer Assam but faced a large number of revolts all over his kingdom from Afghanistan, Assam, Rajasthan, Punjab, Deccan, etc. Guru Tej Bahadur, Govind Singh, Shivaji and his own son, Akbar revolted against him. Shivaji succeeded in establishing an independent Maratha kingdom. Aurangzeb conquered Bijapur in 1685 CE and Golconda in 1687 CE. His death was followed by a succession conflict amongst his sons.

Toeholds - a position in a place or an activity that you hope will lead to more power or success (*noun*)

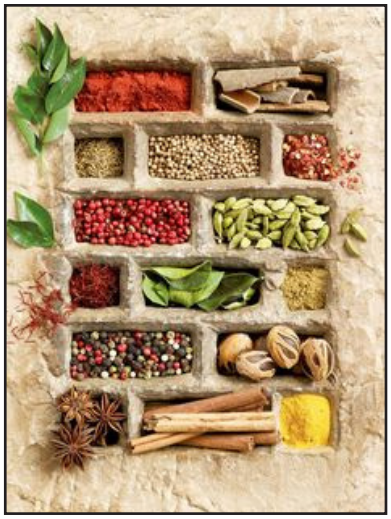
Highlands - connected with an area of land that has hills or mountains (*adj.*)

3.3 The Rise of the East India Company

In 1600, a group of London merchants led by Sir Thomas Smythe petitioned Queen Elizabeth I to grant them a royal charter (royal permission) to trade with the countries of the eastern hemisphere. And so, the 'Honourable Company of Merchants of London Trading with the East Indies' – or East India Company, as it came to be known – was founded.

Above: *The coat of arms of the East India Company. The text on the base is Latin for "With God leading, nothing will harm us."*

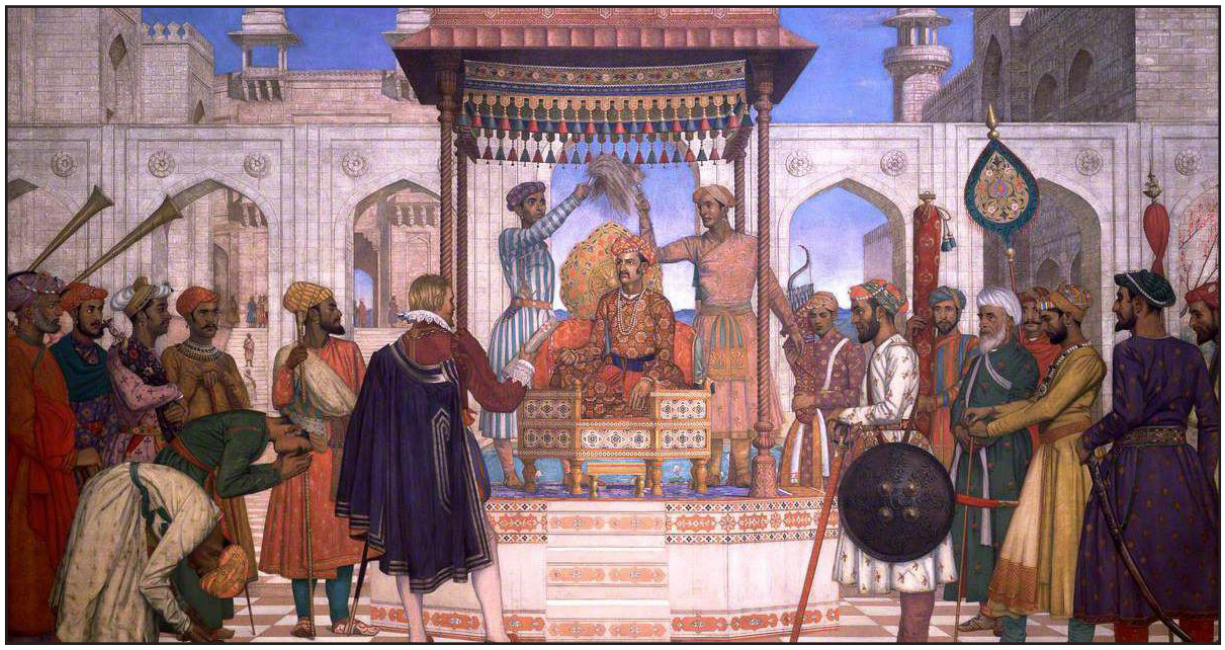
At the same time as Elizabeth I was signing the East India Company (EIC) into existence in 1600, her counterpart in India – the Mughal emperor Akbar – was ruling over an empire of 750,000 square miles, stretching from northern Afghanistan in the northwest, to central India's Deccan plateau in in the south and the Assamese highlands in the northeast.



Above: *A photo of spices. The trade in spices accounted for much of the EIC's profits.*

By 1600, the Mughal empire (founded by Akbar's grandfather, Babur, in 1526) was a well-established system with a strong centralized government and a powerful military. The Mughal court possessed a wealth and magnificence to overshadow anything that Europe could produce at the time, while India's natural produce and that of its artisans was coveted all over the world.

When the East India Company first visited the Mughal court in the early 17th century, they came as supplicants, humbly asking the Emperor Jehangir for permission to establish trade outposts and trading relations. With Emperor Jahangir's permission, they began to build small bases, or factories, on India's eastern and western coasts. From these coastal toeholds, they conducted a profitable trade in spices, textiles and luxury goods.



Above: *A painting of Sir Thomas Roe, the English diplomat sent to obtain permission to establish trade factories in India from Emperor Jahangir. The painting depicts him requesting the Emperor Jahangir (shown seated) for trading rights.*

Toehold - From Middle English toe + hold

Highlands - From Proto-West Germanic *hauhaland* (equivalent to high + land)

The 'joint stock' organization of the company (in which ownership was shared between shareholders) spread the cost and risk of individual voyages between investors. The company grew in both size and influence across the 17th and 18th centuries. Although it was always risky, EIC shares became an important part of the British economy and the company emerged as one of London's most powerful financial institutions.

Despite the fact that the EIC was originally just a small part of the sophisticated trade networks of the Mughal empire, they began exerting more influence in the 1700's. Following the death of the Emperor Aurangzeb, the Mughal empire entered a period of rapid decline and many successor states emerged. The EIC took advantage of this anarchy. As well as maintaining a large standing army consisting primarily of sepoys (Indian mercenary soldiers trained in European military techniques), the EIC was able to call on British naval power and crown troops garrisoned in India.

These military advantages made the EIC a powerful player in local conflicts and disputes. The EIC was also helped greatly by local Indian merchants and bankers, such as the Jagat Seth family, who were willing to loan the EIC money in order to further their own agenda.

Top Right and Right: *Paintings of Indian sepoys. Sepoys were Indian mercenary soldiers who were trained in the European methods of fighting. The word Sepoy is an anglicized version of the word Sipahi, which is Persian for soldier. The French were the first European power in India to creat units of Sepoys in order to protect thier commerical and strategic interests. Other European powers soon followed suit.*

The term "sepoy" continues to be used in the modern Indian, Pakistan and Nepalese armies, where it denotes the rank of private.

The Jagat Seth Banking Family

Jagat Seth was simply a title conferred by an emperor, and can be interpreted as 'banker or merchant of the world'. The family which became known as the 'Jagat Seths' was founded by a jeweller-turned-moneylender from Rajasthan who later settled in Patna. The family's wealth continued to grow, and reached unimaginable heights over the next two generations. From minting money, collecting revenues and remittances, and lending to emperors and zamindars the House of Jagat Seth was no less than a central bank.

Problems, however, set in when Siraj-ud-daulah took over from his grandfather, Nawab Alivardi Khan, as ruler of Bengal. Siraj's hotheadedness and foolish arrogance led him into direct conflict with the Jagat Seths, ruining a relationship which had existed for centuries. The Jagat Seths, upset with Siraj, decided to back the EIC financially in their upcoming conflict with Siraj - culminating in the Battle of Plassey. The family provided the EIC with large loans of money; in many ways it was these loans that made the EIC victory at Plassey possible.

Above: *The House of Jagat Seth, in Nashipur, a village in the district of Murshidabad, West Bengal.*

Mercenary - a soldier who will fight for any country or group that offers payment (*noun*)
Arrogance - the behavior of a person when they feel that they are more important than other people (*noun*)

3.4 The Battle of Plassey

By the mid-18th century, the Mughal Empire, which had once controlled most of the Indian subcontinent, was in a state of collapse. The East India Company was one of these competing powers. While battling the French for trading supremacy, it also began to involve itself in local politics, especially in Bengal, India's richest province.

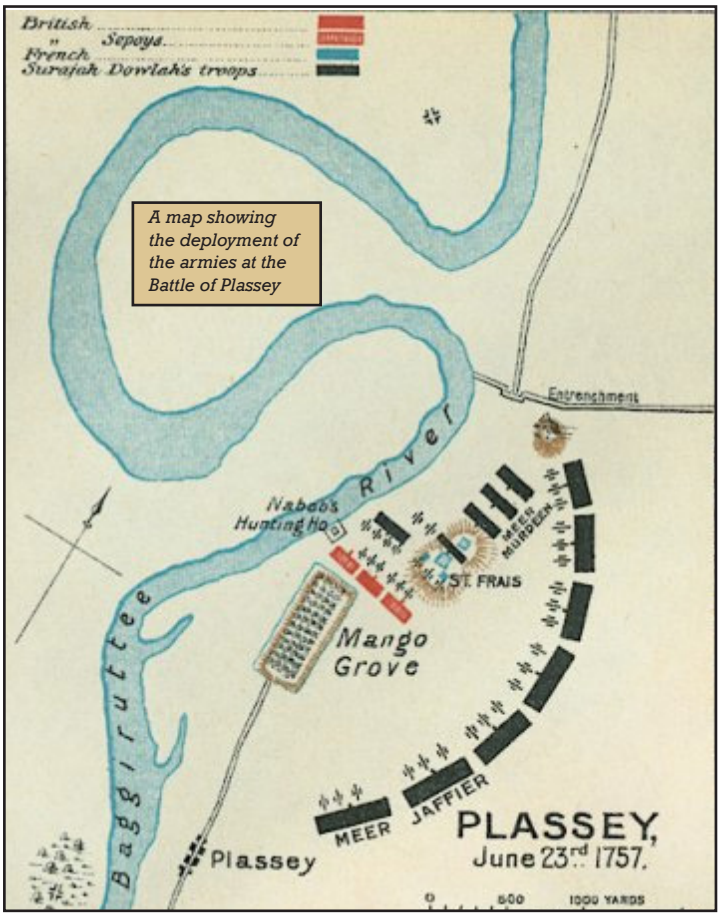
The Bengali ruler Siraj-ud-Daulah had been in dispute with the Company for some time. A year before the Battle of Plassey he had attacked and captured the Company's stronghold of Fort William in Calcutta (Kolkata). This tension culminated in the Battle of Plassey in 1757.

The Armies:

Siraj-ud-Daulah commanded around 50,000 men, including 16,000 cavalry. He also had 50 field guns. Officers on loan from the French commanded this artillery.

Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Clive commanded the British force. Formerly a clerk, Clive had switched to the Company's military service. His army was about 3,000-strong, including 2,100 Indian sepoys (infantry) and about 800 Europeans. Clive had only ten field guns and two small howitzers.

The EIC won after heavy rain soaked Siraj's gunpowder. The British gunners had covered their stocks with tarpaulins while Siraj had failed to do so. At this point, Mir Jafar, who was in charge of the Nawab's cavalry, refused to fight, having been secretly bribed by the British.



A map showing the deployment of the armies at the Battle of Plassey

Primary Source Study

'The fire of battle and slaughter began in earnest. But as the **nation of hat-wearers** have no equals in the art of firing their artillery and musketry with both order and rapidity, there commenced such an incessant rain of balls and bullets, and such a hot endless firing, that the spectators themselves were amazed and confounded; and those in the battle had their hearing deafened by the continual thunder, and their eye-sight dimmed by the endless flashing of the execution'.

Bengali writer Ğulam Husayn Han describing the Battle of Plassey (1757). From a piece written in 1781

***Right:** A modern re-enactment of British infantry performing **volley fire**. This method of attack required the troops to stand close together in a tightly packed formation, and fire in unison. This unleashed a devastating volley of bullets that could break and rout most enemy formations.*

Mercenary - From Latin *merces* (reward)

Arrogance - From Latin *arrogans* (overbearing)

Aftermath of the Battle of Plassey

After the battle was won, the EIC placed Mir Jafar in charge of Bengal. He then had Siraj-ud-Daulah assassinated. However, Mir Jafar's reign would not last for long. When the EIC discovered that he had made a secret treaty with the Dutch, they unceremoniously ousted him from power, sent him into exile, and replaced him with his son-in-law.

Right: *The tomb of Siraj-ud-Daulah*

After the military victories at the battles of Plassey (1757) and the later battle of Buxar (1764), the EIC was granted the diwani of Bengal. This gave them control over the administration of the region and the right to collect tax revenue. This completely changed the balance of power in the region. The EIC no longer needed to import gold from England to pay for its purchases in India. Instead, it could take the money it collected in taxes from Bengal, and use these to pay for its purchases. The profits of the company soared, and made many of the shareholders and company officials incredibly wealthy.

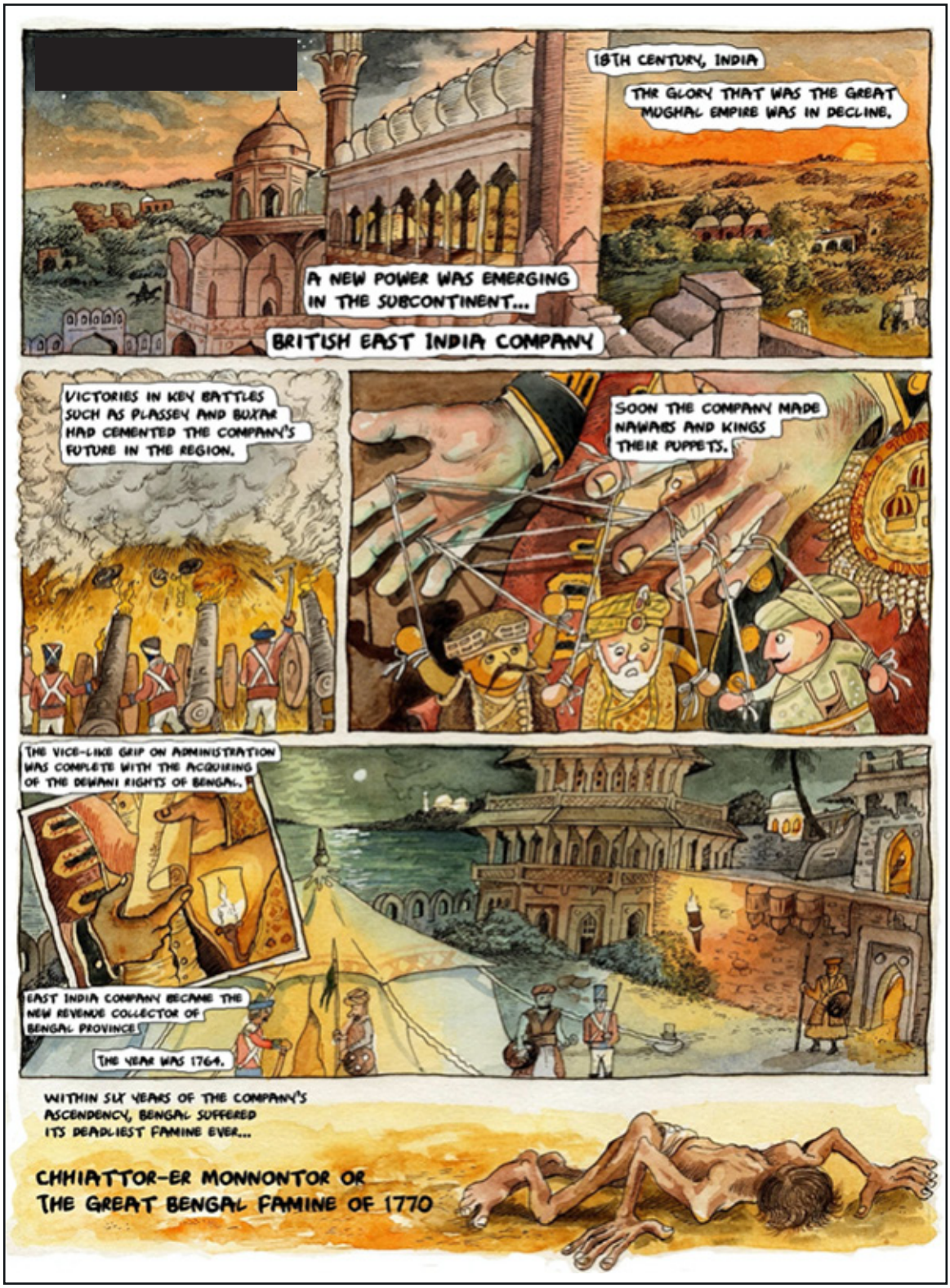
The EIC would go on to control and plunder much of India for the next 100 years. Their desire for profits and more income led to many calamities in India, such as the Bengal famine of 1769-1771, in which between 7 and 10 million people died. This was partially a result of the EIC increasing taxes from 15% (the percentage of tax levied by previous Mughal rulers) to 50%, in order to maximize their profits.

Through this time period, the Company also expanded its influence over local rulers in the south, until by the 1770s the balance of power had fundamentally changed. Expansion continued and rivals such as the Marathas and Tipu Sultan of Mysore were defeated. By 1818, the EIC was the main political power in India; They directly controlled over two thirds of the subcontinent and exercised indirect control over the rest. The Company would go on to control much of India until the uprising of 1857, after which the British government decided to directly administer India as a part of their Empire.

Above: *The Mughal emperor Shah Alam hands a scroll to Robert Clive, the governor of Bengal (Treaty of Allahabad), which transferred tax collecting rights in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the East India Company, August 1765. This was in the aftermath of the Battles of Plassey and Buxar.*

Howitzer - a heavy gun that fires shells high into the air for a short distance (noun)

Confounded - used when describing something to show that you are annoyed (adj)



Above: *A page of graphic artwork from the Chhiattor-er Monnotor story by Argha Manna and Debkumar Mitra. The Bengal famine of 1770 is popularly known as "Chhiattor-er Monnontor", or "Famine of '76", since 1769-70 is the year 1176 in the Bengali calendar. Over one-third of Bengal's population perished over the course of these two years.*

The short graphic novel contains a good explanation of the events that led to the famine, and the role that the EIC played in creating it. The full piece can be found online at faminetales.exeter.ac.uk under the Chhiattor exhibition.

Howitzer - From an old Czech word *haufnice* (a catapult that could fire many stones)
Confounded - From Latin *confundere* (to pour together/ mix up)